

July showers have been good in the Shortgrass Country. Just a short distance from the ranch, some of our neighbors have had up to 5 inches for the month. I was on a pipeline tour yesterday. We crossed one outfit that looked like the setting for an "Alice in Wonderland" movie. Spring water was seeping from the hills; old boys running tractors had made cleated tracks that'll last for 30 years.

We haven't shared in the rains. One-tenth at a time has been our big readings. Shade and cloud cover have been abandoned, but the moisture hasn't.

Forecasts from the San Angelo Weather Station kept up my morale during the summer dry spell. In April, I started recording their calls since I didn't have much bookwork to do on the rainfall. Out of 10 severe weather alerts and 14 flood watches, we had enough wind for 12-foot windmills to keep our stock tanks full and sufficient flooding to fill the water holes once on the big draw.

On one occasion, I used a two-way radio to stay in contact with a cowboy that lives on the head waters of the river during a flood watch. The television station was beeping out warnings every 10 minutes. Citizens in low lying areas, so it sounded, needed to immediately climb the highest pecan tree in their yard until life jackets were air-dropped. This cowboy and myself went off duty at 10 p.m. We decided that a half-inch of slow rain wasn't going to cause anyone on the watershed any trouble unless they had a chicken brooder that leaked.

In other times, people slept through lots of bad storms. Without the media to flash warnings, things moderated about bedtime, especially if the cloud watchers had spent the day riding horseback or sitting on a rowbinder.

Weather must look more fierce on a radar screen or from a TV station than it does out on the rangeland. One night in Mertzon, for example, the channel was announcing a dreadful prediction for our area. Hail and wind and rain were going to level the town. I walked out in the midst of that terrible storm in my houseshoes to cut off the water in our flower beds. I will admit, however, that there was a ring around the moon.

Shortgrass weathermen don't deserve all the blame for the miscalls. Our country is famous over the U. S. for being a tough spot for pilots to trust the forecasts. Calling it dry and sunny will nearly always work, but at times it can be subject to rapid change.

Hombres getting all this early rain are going to be sorry when frost knocks over their grassbelly cattle. At the rate we are missing, our old cows

will be ready for winter in September. Too much rain ruins the best of Shortgrass operators.